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POLICIES OF APARTHEID OF THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA

Letter dated 24 May 1991 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to draw your attention to a misleading statement issued on 8 May 1991 by the Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid on the issue of violence in South Africa and on the return of exiles and release of political prisoners. This statement was based on a selective reading of events and ignored the declarations and actions of the South African authorities on both subjects.

The State President and senior members of his Government have consistently expressed their deep concern at the tragic human dimension of the current wave of violence between different factions in the country. It has now become the single greatest obstacle to the initiation of constitutional negotiations, which remain a principal objective of Government. The steps they have already taken include:

1. The continuation of firm and impartial action by the Police and the South African Defence Force, with special actions from time to time.

2. Strengthening South African Police manpower and equipment.

3. Involving the whole community in a strategy against violence by holding a multi-party conference on 24 and 25 May 1991.

4. Establishing a standing commission to investigate complaints of violence and advise the Government.

5. The launching of programmes to create employment and deal with adverse social conditions.

6. An intensification of control over dangerous weapons.

7. Assistance to the victims of violence through a special aid fund.

8. Upgrading or converting hostels.

9. Divesting security laws of restrictions on democratic activity.

10. Continuing the process of reconciliation and negotiation.

The Government accepts that it bears the primary responsibility for combating violence, but it has emphasized that all community leaders have a joint responsibility for prevailing upon their followers to desist from violence and resolve their differences peacefully.

The Government discharges its responsibility and exercises its power in a responsible manner in an effort to avoid exacerbating the situation. It does not believe that to return to draconian measures would be conducive to long-term stability and peaceful negotiation. That is why, apart from its measures to strengthen the forces of law and order and render them more efficient, it has striven to reconcile the leadership of the different factions and to impress on everyone the vital need for peace as a prelude to progress.

The State President convened the multi-party conference on 24 and 25 May pertinently to address the issue of violence and to seek solutions agreed by all. It regrets that some important organizations, including the African National Congress and the South African Council of Churches, have not indicated their willingness to attend. No one can evade responsibility for contributing towards an initiative for peace.

With regard to the release of political prisoners, agreement was reached between the Government and the ANC that 30 April 1991 was a target date for their release. The Government also agreed to remove obstacles to the granting of indemnity by the same date, an obligation which it discharged.

The Government has neither the capacity nor the responsibility to persuade South Africans living abroad to return to South Africa and/or to apply for indemnity. Of the 5,872 applications for indemnity received by 30 April, 4,585 were approved. Four hundred and two were referred back to the ANC as they were inadequately completed, while consideration of an additional 526 was delayed because ANC representatives failed to attend a meeting to discuss them. Ninety applications were found not to qualify or were referred to special indemnity committees for further evaluation. Of the remainder being processed, many were awaiting supplementary information.

Nine hundred and thirty-three prisoners were released between 2 February and 30 April but a good number of applications for indemnity and/or for the release of political offenders were still being received right up to 30 April and thereafter making it impossible for the Government to process them by the

target date. The ANC had had eight months to submit these applications. Efforts, in which representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross are joining on the Government's invitation, are being pursued to ensure that all prisoners who may be entitled to release as political offenders are identified.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 34.

(Signed) Jeremy B. SHEARAR
Ambassador
Permanent Representative